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T/III.I/M-3
20 April 1965

U N I T E D S T A T E S I N T E L L I G E N C E B O A R D

COMMITTEE ON DOCUMENTATION

TASK TEAM III - WORKING GROUP ON TRANSLITERATION

Minutes of the Third Meeting, 7 April 1965

Members or Their Representatives Present

25X1 CIA - [redacted] Chairman
ARMY - Mr. Henry Holz
AIR FORCE - Mr. Wieslaw Arlet
25X1 CSS - [redacted] Secretary

Others Present

25X1 [redacted] FDD/CIA
Mr. Frank C. Shepard, AMS

1. The minutes of the second meeting of the working group were reviewed. The first sentence of paragraph 5 was changed to read: At present, there are four major systems being used in the Community, i.e., BGN, LoC, BSI and NSA's system.

2. Members present reported manhours expended since the last meeting in support of the working group.

25X1 3. [redacted] mentioned additional USSR languages such as Azerbaydzhani, Ukrainian, Kazakh, and Georgian which present problems in dealing with place names, institution names, etc., after having been transliterated into Russian. Problems of using German, Italian and Greek transliterations of Russian, each of which use different transliteration systems were also touched upon. These are problems which appear to be unresolvable because of ambiguities introduced at a point which we cannot
25X1 control. [redacted] stated that these are very real problems but that they should not be permitted to obscure areas where logical transliteration can be used to open new areas of computer support to the processing and exploitation of foreign language publications.

Group 1
Excluded from automatic downgrading and declassification.

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4. Mr. Holz discussed some of the problems the Russians have in transliterating from Roman to Cyrillic characters, e.g., the absence of an equivalent for the letter "h" and the resulting inconsistency in transliterating English place names into Russian.

5. Mr. Arlet read his statement on Problems of Prescribed Transliteration Systems for Geographic Names BGN (Attachment). This paper was prepared in response to an assignment made at the last meeting. Mr. Arlet indicated that the statement had been cleared with Mr. Pughe, ATD/LoC. Mr. Avram requested that copies bemade for those present. This was done and copies were distributed.

6. For the benefit of Mr. Shepard and [redacted] restated the task of the working group, i.e., to determine if there is a need for standard transliteration systems within the Intelligence Community. He explained that we are looking at Cyrillic to Roman transliteration problems to provide us with the specific insights to aid us in determining if needs exist for standardizing the methods of transliteration from one alphabet to another. [redacted] emphasized that we are not selecting a particular Cyrillic - Roman transliteration method upon which to standardize at this time. It is possible, however, to say that within a given system, reversability, i.e., the capability of going from Cyrillic to Roman and back to Cyrillic may constitute a problem. Between systems, the problem appears to be one of convertability, i.e., the capability of going from one transliteration method to another without loss of character definition. A good example of the problem occurs in the filing of transliterated information. If different transliteration systems have been used, similar or even identical items will be filed alphabetically in different places. When the resulting files are exchanged or attempts made to convert them to another system, retrieval may be degraded substantially.

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7. Mr. Shepard raised the problem of diacritic marks. He mentioned a problem that AMS had had in utilizing a Honeywell computer for which the input preparation device character set does not accomodate diacritics. [redacted] acknowledged this problem and agreed that diacritics would have to be provided for in certain languages. He also mentioned a third problem, one involving output typewriters, printers, etc. and their capability of providing an acceptable transliterated product. [redacted] stated that these problems could probably be solved, but that implementing the solutions might require compromises.

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8. In response to a query by Mr. Arlet concerning the part Interior's Board of Geographic Names (BGN) would or should play in our deliberations in transliteration, [redacted] noted that State's ad hoc member on the working group was Mr. Pearcy who is the Department Geographer and is a member of the BGN. Mr. Shepard indicated that he is Army's member on BGN and in this capacity is Chairman of the Foreign Names Committee. He is also a member of the Publications Board. He mentioned as an example of

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a machine problem the fact that many place names in Danish employ ligatures, e.g., the letters "a" and "e" joined together making up a unique character. Mr. Shepard discussed the BGN-PCGN Cyrillic - Roman transliteration system. He indicated that the present system was established in 1947 in response to requirements for transliteration of place names for mapping purposes. It was designed to provide a pronouncible Roman form for Cyrillic place names. Mr. Shepard felt that the problem of providing transliteration for use in conjunction with computers could be worked out with BGN if we specify the problem to them and indicate what is needed to solve it. [redacted] invited Mr. Shepard to attend future meetings of the working group whenever it was possible for him to do so.

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9. [redacted] gave a preliminary report of his experience in discussing the transliteration problem in CIA. He indicated that he had had discussions with people in Foreign Installations Branch (FIB), Document Dissemination Branch (DD), Special Register (SR), Biographic Register (BR), Graphics Register (GR) and the Information Retrieval Group in the Library (LY) - all are components of OCR. [redacted] indicated that a written report will be submitted on his findings in the near future.

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10. Copies of the Stage I Report, Volume II, Appendix F of the SCIPS Report on Foreign Publications Findings and Analysis were distributed to members present. [redacted] gave a run down on this item, its background, scope and method. [redacted] requested that copies of this document be sent to all members for their review and discussion at the next meeting.

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11. Members were called upon to express their reactions to deliberations that had occurred to date in the working group. There ensued discussion of the meaning of the word "ambiguity" in terms of transliteration systems. [redacted] stressed the machine processing requirement for one-to-one character correspondence between Cyrillic and Roman in Russian-English transliteration. Each Cyrillic symbol should be transliterated into Roman in one way and in one way only. He emphasized that ambiguity occurs when a Roman character is used to represent a Cyrillic character and also is used as part of a Roman digraph or tetragraph, e.g., the "y", the "a" and the "ya" transliteration of Cyrillic. The result is an ambiguous situation which is impossible to resolve deterministically by programming of a computer. A probabilistic or linguistic resolution may be obtained but this could carry risks for critical intelligence.

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12. [redacted] indicated that he anticipated that [redacted] would be ready to discuss at the next meeting of the working group a system of unambiguous transliteration of Cyrillic-Roman characters which permits reversability.

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13. A new system of visitor control has been installed at CIA Headquarters. A list of personnel attending the next working group meeting will be sent to the Main Receptionist. Please report to her as in the past. She will issue the Temporary USIB badge which permits you to proceed unescorted to Room 2E62, our regular conference room, 2nd floor, E corridor, Room 62 for the meeting. The next meeting is scheduled for 1000 hours, 28 April 1965 at CIA Headquarters.

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[redacted]
Secretary

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